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ABSTRACT

The context for considering faculty career vitality is addressed. It is suggested that the unit of study should be individual, and that both internal and external influences should be considered. A contrasting view is that the institution should be the unit of study. A Pennsylvania State University study revealed that faculty career decisions were made individually, and that the personnel policy and administration staff had little effect on choice. Another study, which considered professional collaboration among faculty and other practitioners, indicated that the quality of professional performance was linked to the individual professor, to small groups, and to a set of strongly held values. The views of Max Weber concerning bureaucratic organization, Clark Kerr's concept of the "multiversity," and the emphasis on assessing the institutional and systems level are considered. It is claimed that the institutional orientation is not oriented to the essential processes of learning. It is concluded that while the institutional view may be appropriate to research, it is inappropriate to an exploration of vitality, and that teachers face a tension between building and transmitting expertise in their field versus participating in the management and governance of the institution. (SW)

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SYMPOSIUM:

QUALITATIVE APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF FACULTY CAREER VITALITY
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TOPIC:

THE LOCUS OF CAREER VITALITY

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INTRODUCTION

More a commentary than a research report, these observations are prompted by two studies we have been doing with faculty as subjects. In each case, the scope of faculty perceptions and their intricate analysis of events, and possibilities as well, has led me to wonder whether we give full and accurate attention to the context in which academics act. Thinking about this prompted the thesis that we have in invented and constructed a view that the institution is a real entity, a unit of study unto itself, and events must be fitted into it. The debatable part of the argument lies in the contention that this "institutionalism" is far removed from the teaching-learning situation, and the disciplinary paradigms where faculty live.

NOTES ON THE STUDIES

The study of faculty career change decisions involved interviews with 134 faculty members who left Penn State, 1978-80, to enter retirement, move to another institution, or undertake non-academic employment (Toombs, Marlier, 1981). Several general conclusions were supported: (1) decisions were made individually by combining personal assessments of the internal and external environment, (2) almost no interaction or consultation within the University preceded these decisions, (3) even though this institution has what must be seen as an enlightened personnel program, the instruments of policy are so coarse in nature that they have little effect on choice. Usually rules can be avoided or evaded. In summary, the autonomy of individual judgment and decision, a characteristic to which academics are trained in their disciplines, is also a part of personal decision making.

A second study, just now being completed, examined factors that will affect a program of collaboration between faculty members and practitioners in several other professions (Toombs, 1983). A survey of 10% of the teaching faculty on aspects of past experience, the evaluation of certain behaviors common in academic life, and on preferences about administrative matters, indicated strong qualitative emphases. For example, the dominant value was recognition for the substance of one's work. Publication, awards, compensation, research, all derived significance from the relationship to one's work. They have only small intrinsic value beyond use as proxies. What is evident here is a quality of "professional performance" not unlike the performance of the artist. Again, like autonomy, the phenomenon is individual. Both these studies seem to point out that the locus of quality is in the individual professor, in small groups, and in a set of strongly held values. If the essence of quality and of qualitative studies is located in the micro-settings, how did we get so far afield?

MAX WEBER, CLARK KERR, AND NCHEMS

The problem begins with Max Weber. His definitive analysis of the ultimate rational organization, a bureaucracy, was detailed, accurate and, above all, timely. Based on specialized responsibility and expertise, the whole construction was beautifully attuned to rising technology and the corporation. Other organizational forms did not come out so well under his pen. Collegiality in particular was badly handled. It is portrayed as a way of subduing and controlling authority. The idea of merging varied expertise by exchange, of deriving authority from the relevance one's knowledge holds for a

particular setting or issue was not well developed. Max Weber got us off on the wrong foot (Parsons, 1947)

When Abraham Flexner wrote his chapter on a "modern university" (1930-1968) reporting its increasing specialization, he sensed the shadows of institutionalism noting: "Of Harvard's expenditures not more than one-eighth is devoted to the central university disciplines at the level at which the university ought to be conducted." He defended against rising institutionalism by insisting that peripheral activities be cast off to hold the center fast. "The university is an institution consciously devoted to the pursuit of knowledge, the solution of problems, the critical application of achievement, and the training of men at a really high level." While Flexner rejected the idea of a corporate entity that could be more than the sum of its parts, the next intellectual generation embraced it and extended it.

Clark Kerr with insight and enthusiasm invested the institutional concept with a name, the "multiversity" and timely virtues (1963-1972). It could manage federal grants, mediate differences among the numerous "communities" that were emerging, and administer resources. All this reconceptualization came about, he maintained, through the dynamics of history and circumstance: " . . . administration becomes, by force of circumstance, if not by choice, a more prominent feature of the university." Administration assumes the "burden of these relationships" among constituencies, internal and external.

One can ask some interesting "what if" questions about these early stages of institutionalism: Why did the corporate form analagous to the industrial enterprise emerge? Why not a federal model, given the richness of the American tradition with that idea? Or why not the

city-state to contain diverse communities in a classical relationship?

Once set on the path of the corporate "multiversity" the prophecy began fulfilling itself -- and with considerable quality. Fred Balderston's superb group at Berkeley unfolded the whole panoply of management. The "essential domains" of analysis according to Balderston (1974) are "funding, resource-inputs, activities, goals." Institutionalism required two things, close control of variables and the inclusion of many variables as possible under that span of control. As a consequence, the multiversity welcomed more and more responsibilities that had less and less to do with the essentials of learning.

The NCHEMS contribution was especially significant. Anthropologists, sociologists, and philosphers have all called attention to the effects of "naming" and classifying. C. Wright Mills has a wonderful phrase; working in the "optative mode" -- "what one hopes for is spoken of as if it exists" (1962). The result was a rich terminology filled with labels we have almost ceased to question -- programs, cost centers, decision-makers, resources, institutional goals, priorities, allocation, budgets, accountability, market indicators, etc.

Twenty years of cultivation have brought the institutional view to a peak of influence. The effects on research are powerful. The funds to do research are likely to be available at the institutional and system level to support inquiry. Studies at that level appear to be more significant on the promise of size alone. One consequence has been a rich literature on how higher education looks from the macro system level and much less on the essential processes. Consider the difference between a research proposal on "consensual processes at the department level" on the one hand, and the "determination of effective tenure

quotas," on the other. Which is more likely to be funded in today's world?

In some fundamental ways the propagation of an institutional orientation has opened a gap that sets aside the essential activity of education and learning. To begin with, faculty are in control of what Marx called the "means of production," the intellectual capital and specialized fund of knowledge that stand at the heart of both teaching and research. To borrow further from Marx the dynamic of historical change is the conflict between the "forces of production" and "the relations of production." If Marx is too alien a voice, then we can take some phrases from the Yeshiva court record which pointed out that faculty are a key part of the management structure both as individuals and as a group (Kuechle, 1982). In short, the institution is the shelter in which the essential production takes place, no more.

To concentrate on the institutional scale when searching out the seeds of vitality is to miss a point. Many of the essential activities are embodied in individuals and in the quality of relationships between individuals. McKeachie (1982) has pointed out how intricately apparently simple questions of productivity are linked into personal motivation and the level of individual skill. Unless these can be standardized they are hard to manage. Even advocates of the larger view are finding it difficult to sustain. Without confessing the inadequacy of the concept, "institutionalists" have invented new terms to explain the shortcomings -- "organized anarchies," and "loosely coupled" systems are two. Finally, much of the scope of faculty interest and activity lies outside the institution, in the discipline, in a set of boundary situations in society, or with practitioners. Faculty are "locals" and

"cosmopolitans" at the same time. These mixes cannot be easily incorporated into the institutional control framework.

Faculty, however, is a slightly ambiguous noun. As a collective noun, the faculty, it is a singular constituency. Institutionalism encourages study of "the faculty" as an entity. One can even discern some collective indicators of quality. It is not a false approach to follow the institutional view in research: rather it is inappropriate to an exploration of vitality.

SOCIALIZATION, REPRESENTATION, AND DEVELOPMENT:

Even as the institutional view has grown, there have been significant changes in the academic profession itself. Some of these are also found in other professions but that does not lessen their importance. These, too, press toward a micro view of vitality.

For example, there is a fundamental tension in the activities of most professions. For physicians it is between scientific treatment of a disease and humane care for the patient; for social workers the client interests and the establishment rules are in tension, for academics it is tension between building and transmitting expertise in one's field and participating in the management or governance of the institution. A whole generation of faculty, perhaps two, have now grown up with a value structure that barely admits the importance of instruction, participation in policymaking, and the modification of programs. The neglect has been predicated on the notion that other "experts" in curriculum, administration, and leadership will pick up these functions. Faculty, in their professional preparation, are not formally introduced to many aspects of their profession and particularly not to

organizational considerations. There is nothing resembling the clerkship of law, medical residency, or even the "habilitation" of the European scholar. As a result, the baggage of every academic professional is filled with ambiguities and incomplete understandings, even on basic points, about the institution he inhabits.

This situation has not been helped by the overal organization of the profession. From my point of view the seriousness of the present unguarded state of the academic profession can scarcely be over-estimated. There simply is no professional organization to speak for faculty. The AAUP has taken a road as a collective bargaining agent that will disenfranchise most of us over the next several years. There is no body of case law to set the boundaries of practice and the censure traditions of AAUP lack generalizability. There are only informal statements to set forth the canons of the profession. In short, the societal role of academics in America is in need of clarification and confirmation in very fundamental ways. The vitality of the profession depends on it.

ONE PROSPECTUS

Where does this lead in a search for faculty vitality? Certainly not to profiles of tenure ratios and rank structure. Certainly not to workload formulas and staffing patterns. If we go back to the grammatical roots it fixes attention on "faculty," the distribution noun. The unit of study, it seems to me, must be individual and the context, in which he or she is operating, internal and external. The survival of the institution is not separated from the strenght of its components. Only by looking at the reach of faculty interests,

contexts, and behaviors one by one, or in small groups, and by looking beyond the institution can we begin to assess the riddle of intellectual vitality.

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